

# Taking a good look at the... Walson Optometry Clinic

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Imagine an aircraft maintainer misreading a technical order due to a vision impairment and installing the wrong part on an aircraft waiting to takeoff for a contingency operation.

**A**lthough situations like this don't happen every day, it's an example of how important it is to have annual eye exams and to maintain all eyeglass and insert prescriptions — including safety glasses. Thankfully, Air Force people have optometry clinics to help prevent potential accidents like this from happening.

The 305th Medical Group optometry clinic is directly responsible for maintaining the vision health of all active-duty servicemembers and providing care to patients as far away as New York City and upstate Pennsylvania, said Capt. Michael H. Osterhoudt, optometrist and officer in charge of optometry.

"The 305th MDG has the only full-time military optometry clinic in New Jersey," said Master Sgt. Mark Wybierala, optometry noncommissioned officer in charge.

Optometry is here to perform health checks, refractions for glasses and to treat most superficial and systemic conditions of the eye.

"I enjoy working in the optometry clinic because it allows me to meet and interact with people," said Senior Airman Miguel Martinez, 305th MDG optometry technician.

Martinez said he became interested in the medical career field because his family is in the health profession.

"Customers need our services and being able to meet and exceed their expectations goes a long way toward enjoying what we do," said Wybierala.

The three-member team does everything from routine eye exams to identifying previously undiagnosed cases, such as hypertension, diabetes and even rare cases of toxoplasmosis.

They provide care to about 4,500 patients per year and issue about 3,500 prescriptions for glasses, said Wybierala. This section also fits and dispenses about 5,000 pairs of glasses per year.

Optometry troops also assist physical exams technicians to ensure everyone meets Air Force vision standards. They often revise eye-glass prescriptions when vision falls below standard.

Wybierala said the most common and avoidable eye problem they deal with is people who don't maintain their eyeglasses.

"Every active duty member who needs glasses to perform their duty should have two pairs of glasses, including mask inserts," said Wybierala. He said it's a matter of personal responsibility just like hair and uniform maintenance.

Wybierala said the worst eye injury he has ever seen was a case of contact lens abuse caused by ignor-



Airmen Lucy Bays, 605th Aircraft Generation Squadron, gets a visual field test. The test produces a "map" of the individual's field of vision.

ing hygiene issues and an inappropriate wearing schedule.

"Without warning, the patient

woke up one morning legally blind in one eye and with a lot of pain in both eyes. The patient wore the same old and worn-out lenses for two weeks continuously and suffered an ulcer, infection and other problems," said Wybierala.

Although the eye infections healed, the patient suffered vision loss and can never wear contact lenses again.

American military optometry started in the Army during World War II, said Wybierala. Since then, optometry has continued to evolve with innovations like military optical labs being able to produce eye wear unique to the needs of the military.

A new chapter in Air Force optometry began here Aug. 1, as McGuire became a test base for the Air Force's new "Frame of Choice" program allowing military members assigned to McGuire to select from six different styles of glasses instead of the traditional "BCGs."

The six new frames come in three to six different colors and are available at no cost to servicemembers. "Our customers are delighted about this new program and so are we," said Wybierala.

"I'm absolutely delighted with the selection of glasses the optometry clinic has to offer," said Tech. Sgt. Colleen Corbett, 305th MDG. "Now, I don't have to spend a lot of money out of my own pocket to get presentable glasses."

The "Frame of Choice" program isn't like the downtown eyeglass store, but it's a huge step in the right direction," said Wybierala.

Wybierala said people who wear glasses should follow their doctor's advice on the recommended frequency of exams, while people who don't wear glasses should have at least a baseline exam.

For obvious reasons, optometry has been a concern of the military since people first started wearing glasses. "Can't see 'em, can't shoot 'em," said Wybierala. Whether the patient is an airmen, marine, seaman or soldier, when vision is compromised due to injury, infection or neglect, they become a liability instead of an asset.

Photos by Scott Spitzer



(Above) Master Sgt. Mark Wybierala, optometry NCOIC, demonstrates how the clinic conducts glaucoma screenings. The intraocular tension test measures the internal pressure of the eye. (Right) Capt. Michael Osterhoudt, examines the external condition of a patient's eyes using a slit lamp. (Top far right) Osterhoudt uses a phoropter to determine the best eyeglass prescription for a patient. (Bottom far right) Senior Airman Steve Conrad, 305th Medical Group, tries on a pair of eyeglasses from the "Frames of Choice" program here. McGuire is one of approximately 10 Air Force bases testing this program.

